

Opaque Wash

Prepared exclusively for students of
ART INSTRUCTION SCHOOLS

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Each of the many mediums in the world of art has certain qualities that set it apart from the rest, and make that medium best suited for this or that particular type of art work. Ink, for instance, can be used for a great number of purposes where sharpness of line and a minimum of expense are essential. Transparent wash, as another example, has a light, casual elegance that lends itself especially well to fashion illustration and other high key advertising art.

In the same way, opaque wash has proven to be very popular for a variety of commercial art purposes. No other black and white medium can give a picture the photographic accuracy of detail and shading that opaque wash can give.

Opaque and transparent wash are somewhat similar because both involve the rendering of gray tones with accents done in black and white. But, as this lesson will demonstrate, the heavier consistency of opaque wash provides it with a few additional, very interesting possibilities.

When used properly, opaque wash dries very quickly, which eliminates a long waiting period and means that you are able to get your ideas down almost as quickly as they come to you. This same fast drying quality also gives opaque wash a marvelous flexibility. With opaque wash and proper training, you could handle techniques that range from the rough textured, high style approach so popular in contemporary advertising, to the smoothly modeled, photographic effect required for technical illustrating.

Opaque Wash

Developing your creative ability is something like learning to walk. The early steps are often a little clumsy, but practice brings control and progress. And just as a child has to learn to walk before he can run, you have had to learn to use the simple, less complicated mediums before you could master the more complex ones. The work you have done up to this point has prepared you for opaque wash. And opaque wash will not only give you a chance to use the skills you developed with pencil, ink and transparent wash, it will also prepare you for your future experiments with opaque color painting.

Of all the mediums you have worked with, transparent wash is the most similar to opaque wash. Both washes are done with various gray values and accents of black and white. The big difference between the two mediums is found in the consistency of the paint. Transparent wash is very thin and the light areas allow the paper to "show through." Opaque wash, however, is thick enough so even the lightest gray can cover dark areas and pencil lines. The light grays in transparent wash are formed by adding water to black. This is not the case with opaque wash. The grays in opaque wash are created by mixing white tempera paint with black tempera paint (or by mixing opaque white with lamp black).

And because the opaque wash is not "thinned out" with water,

it naturally has more body. This added thickness makes it easier to handle opaque wash because it makes it possible to paint over any unsuccessful area. For this reason, opaque wash is steadily growing in popularity. For, while it can be reproduced to give an effect similar to transparent wash, it is easier to work with. In addition to making corrections easier, the thickness of the paint also offers an excellent range of effects and textures. You will be able to use wet brush, dry brush, wet-on-wet and wet-on-dry techniques for textural variety. The fact is, opaque wash is so versatile it can be combined with almost any other medium. You will be able to use it with charcoal, ink, transparent wash, crayon and pencil.

The harbor scene on this page illustrates some of the values and textures you will be able to create by using opaque wash. Notice the fine use of lights and darks for contrast and the effective use of rapid brush strokes. It is interesting to note that the blacks, whites and light gray areas were all painted over the medium gray base coat. By using the "over-paint technique," the artist was able to let spots of the medium gray shine through for interest. These specks of gray give the picture a fresh, spontaneous look and also give form to the objects. The artist has skillfully used these gray "spots" to indicate shadows in the white areas, and to show highlights in the dark areas.

Once you begin to work with opaque wash, you will see the many ways it resembles transparent wash, so don't be afraid that this medium will be "all new" to you. Instead, look at opaque wash as another stepping stone on the path that leads to your goals in art.



Harbor Scene by Ron McKee.



Tools For Opaque Wash

Just by studying the tools, you'll get a good idea of how a medium works. This is because the materials used are closely related to the methods of working. And, interestingly enough, many of your "opaque wash tools" are the same as your "transparent wash tools." This similarity of tools is your first indication that the techniques you use for both washes are quite a bit alike. For, although opaque wash is not the same as transparent wash, you will still be working with various shades of gray. And these gray mixtures will be applied with brushes like the ones you used with transparent wash.

White Tempera Paint

The main difference between transparent and opaque wash lies in the density or thickness of the paint. Transparent wash is thin because water is used to extend and lighten black. Opaque wash is thick because white tempera paint is used as the mixing medium. In other words, for opaque wash you will be mixing white tempera with black tempera for all of your gray tones. This means that the paint will remain "thick." With thick paint you will have the advantage of being able to paint light areas over dark ones. This will not only make rendering easier, but you will also be able to make corrections more easily.

Brushes and Palette Knives

There are a number of ways you can apply your opaque wash. The most popular tool is the brush. By using good sable brushes you will be able to cover large areas, and also do fine detail work. Some artists will use a bristle brush, however, to apply large areas of flat tone. Many artists use a palette knife for textural interest. This flexible metal knife, however, can also be used for large areas of paint. In addition to being a fine tool for applying paint, it is extremely helpful for mixing.

Palettes

When you begin to mix opaque wash, you will need a palette . . . the article on which an artist puts his colors for mixing. The palette can be a butcher's tray (flat porcelain tray), a shallow bowl, a china palette or a cupcake tin. If you use a large enough mixing surface you can prepare a "set palette." A set palette is one on which you prepare a range of gray tones. By pre-mixing these grays, you will have all of the grays needed for your picture and you won't have to stop to mix each tone as you paint. When you work with opaque wash there is always the chance that the paint will dry out before you finish the whole picture. If this happens, you can add a little water with your brush, and work it back into shape. For this reason, it is a good idea to keep a jar of clean water near your working area. This jar is also helpful for cleaning your brush before you start working with a different gray.

Paper

The paper you use for opaque wash should be similar to the paper you used for transparent wash. Because opaque wash is water base paint, the paper you use should be thick enough so it won't buckle when it gets wet. Illustration board is good for painting, but you will be able to mount any paper on medium weight cardboard for the same result. This added backing keeps the paper from bending and causing the paint to crack and chip. Most colored paper is sturdy enough for opaque wash.

Mixing

Whether you mix your paints in a shallow metal tray or on a china palette, there are certain procedures that you should follow.

One of the most important things to remember is to use clean equipment. This is especially important when you stir the paint and scoop it out of the jar. You can use a table knife or a palette knife for scooping and stirring. Be sure to stir your paint before you scoop any of it out of the jar.

As you begin to work with white and black tempera paint, you will realize that it doesn't take much black to turn white to gray. For this reason, it is usually advisable to add black to white rather than white to black. If you start with white and add small amounts

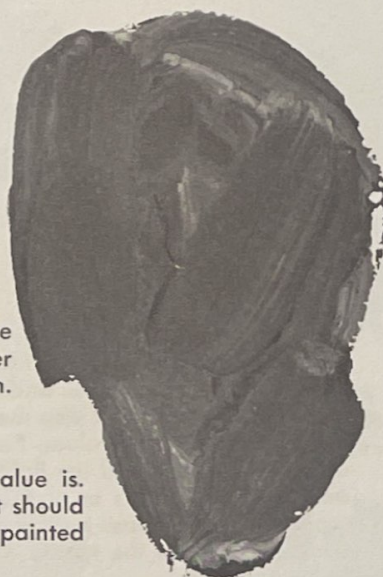
of black at a time, you will be less likely to waste paint. The exception is when you wish to get a dark gray. Then, you would start with black and add white.

WHAT TO DO

Make a small value scale of your own. Start with white at one end and gradually darken the value until you reach a medium gray. Then start with black at the other end and gradually lighten it until you have reached the same value of medium gray. As another exercise, practice laying in small areas of smooth, solid tone similar to those shown at the right side of the page.



This is the first step in mixing black and white tempera. The artist scooped out the amount of white he needed to cover an area, added black and began to mix them with a brush.



This tone is half mixed. Notice how uneven the value is. There are streaks of gray in this mixture. The paint should be blended more evenly to avoid streaks on the painted art work.



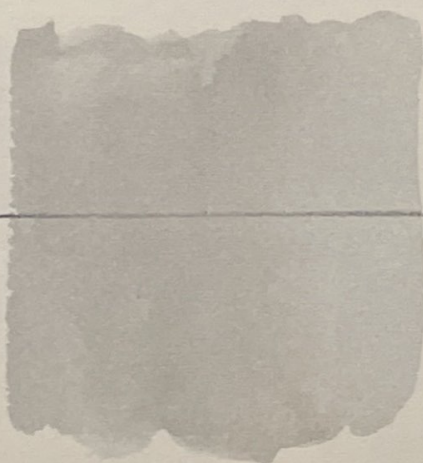
This gray is completely mixed. Notice how even the tone is. The gray does not have streaks of white and black because the artist took care and time to mix this with his brush.

This value scale illustrates the excellent range of grays you will be able to create with opaque wash. The light gray gets darker and darker because the artist added black to the mixture. While it is almost pure

white at one end, it is nearly pure black at the other. In the middle of the scale, the gray tone is a mixture of half black and half white.



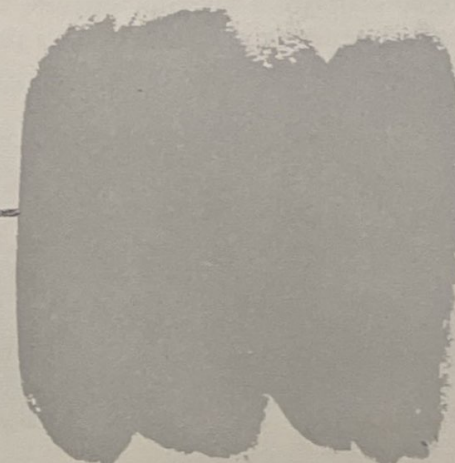
The paint below has too much water in it. Opaque wash should be thick enough to cover a pencil line, yet fluid enough to "flow on" evenly.



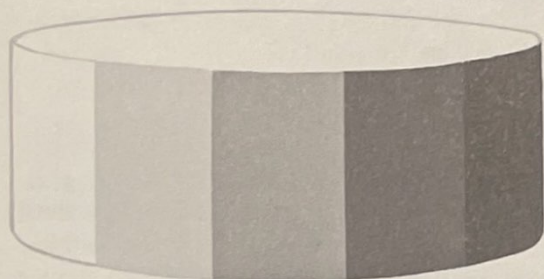
This opaque paint is too thick. It didn't flow smoothly and it looks lumpy. Overly thick paint actually will crack as it dries.



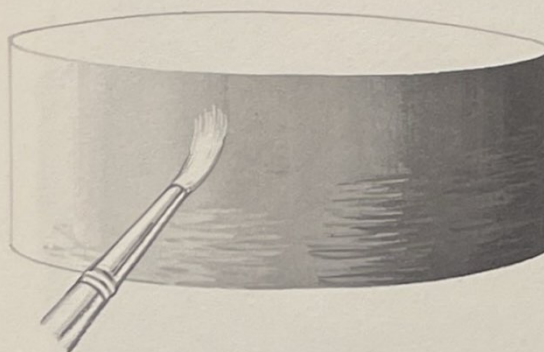
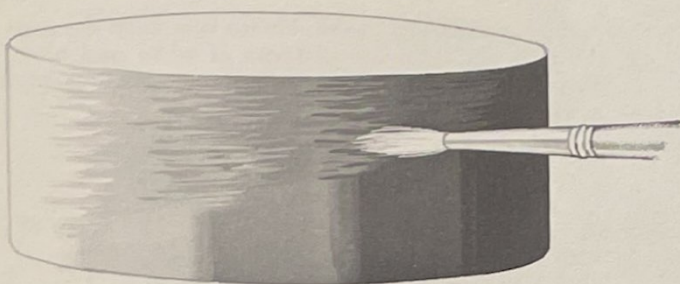
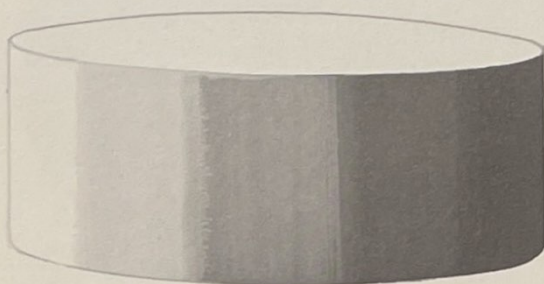
This paint was thick enough to cover the pencil line, but thin enough to flow evenly onto the paper. It was about the consistency of rich cream.



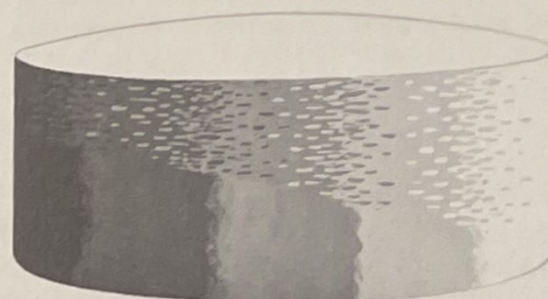
Opaque Wash Rendering



This cylinder illustrates the block method (also called the poster method) of rendering. Here the artist used all of the important value changes on the cylinder. Because this technique is done entirely with flat tones and sharp edges, it is primarily decorative.

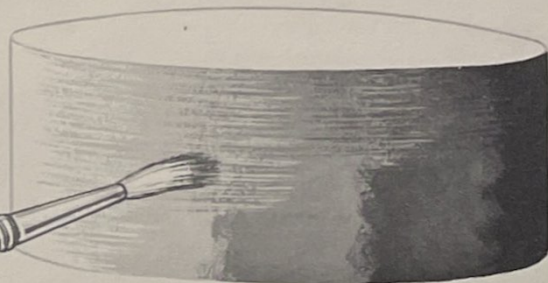
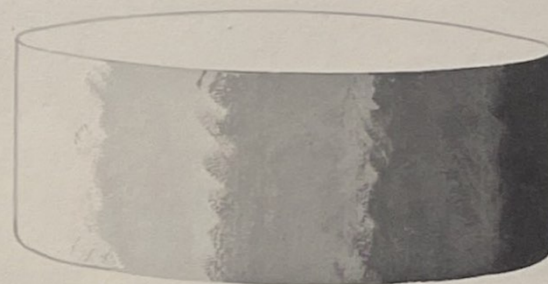


These three steps show you how the artist did the wet blend method of rendering. In the first step the artist used vertical strokes of the main values and allowed the wet paint to run together. In the second step the artist used horizontal brush strokes to blend the values. For these blending strokes the artist once again used the light values on the darker areas and the dark values on the light areas. In the third step the artist used a brush moistened with water to smooth and completely blend the tones.



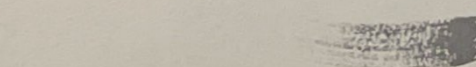
This cylinder shows how the stipple method of rendering is done. Notice on the incomplete area at the bottom how the artist first laid in the major value changes and feathered the edges where they met. To make these value changes appear even more gradual the artist used the point of his brush to make dashes of opaque wash on each side where the tones met. He used dashes of the light tones on the dark areas and dashes of the dark tones on the light areas.

Study the two steps shown for doing dry brush rendering (also called fine brush rendering). Compare this technique to stipple rendering. In both stipple and dry brush rendering the artist first painted in the main values and feathered the edges where they met. But then, instead of using the dashes of the stipple technique the artist did the dry brush cylinder by using horizontal strokes. The artist used dark valued strokes on the light areas and light valued strokes on the dark areas. In order to get the dry brush effect the artist made practice strokes on scratch paper before he made the horizontal strokes. The practice strokes, similar to the one illustrated, removed much of the paint from the brush and made the dry brush effect possible.



WHAT TO DO

Trace these cylinders on tracing paper and then transfer the outlines to a good working surface. Using the different methods described, render the cylinders. This practice will help you prepare for later opaque wash drawings.

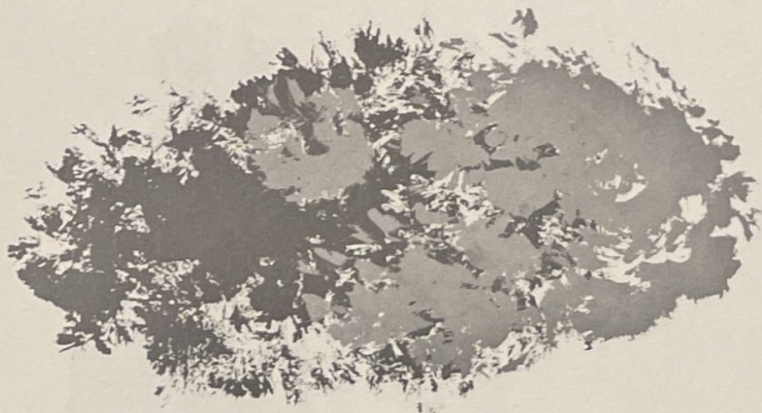


Opaque Wash Exercises

Because opaque wash is quite thick, there is almost no limit to the effects you will be able to create when you paint with it. The textures that are demonstrated on this page show some of the most popular commercial art techniques.

WHAT TO DO

Practice the effects shown here. Also experiment and "invent" some new effects. You might like to work with some of the "tools" you have around your own house. You will be able to get some



Stippling can be done with a minimum of paint on a brush without a point. You should hold the brush vertical (straight up and down). By making fast up and down motions with the brush the hairs separate and leave this effect.



This unusual effect was produced by rubbing into wet paint. The artist "scrubbed" the light tone into the wet, dark paint.

If you paint some areas thick enough you will be able to scratch into them while they are still wet. This scratching was done with the handle of a brush.

Wet paint on dry paint of a contrasting value offers some dynamic effects. The artist used a variety of brush strokes for interest and contrast.

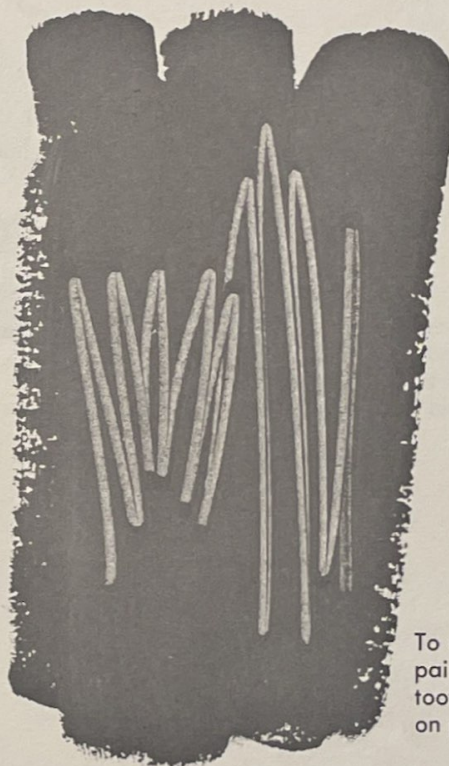


interesting effects by transferring the textures of burlap, sponge and paper toweling. The process of transferring textures is called "monoprinting."

To do a monoprint transfer, use a piece of scratch paper and "load" it with a coat of paint. While the paint is still wet, press the burlap or sponge into the paint. Then press the painted side of the burlap or sponge onto your drawing area. After you have an area textured by "monoprinting," put in details and contrast with your brush and paint.



This artist used a *palette knife* "loaded" with paint. The large areas were created by sliding the flat bottom of a palette knife across the paper. The jagged thin "lines" were done with the edge of the knife.



To do *split brush* techniques, dip a brush into paint and separate the hairs by pushing a toothpick between them or by scrubbing them on paper.



When you paint wet into wet paint, you can get soft and mottled results. This type of rendering is especially popular for in-

dicating water, fur and other soft materials. Notice how the light areas and lines feather naturally into the dark value.



In order to keep the realistic appearance of glass, the artist used sharp tone areas without any wet blending.

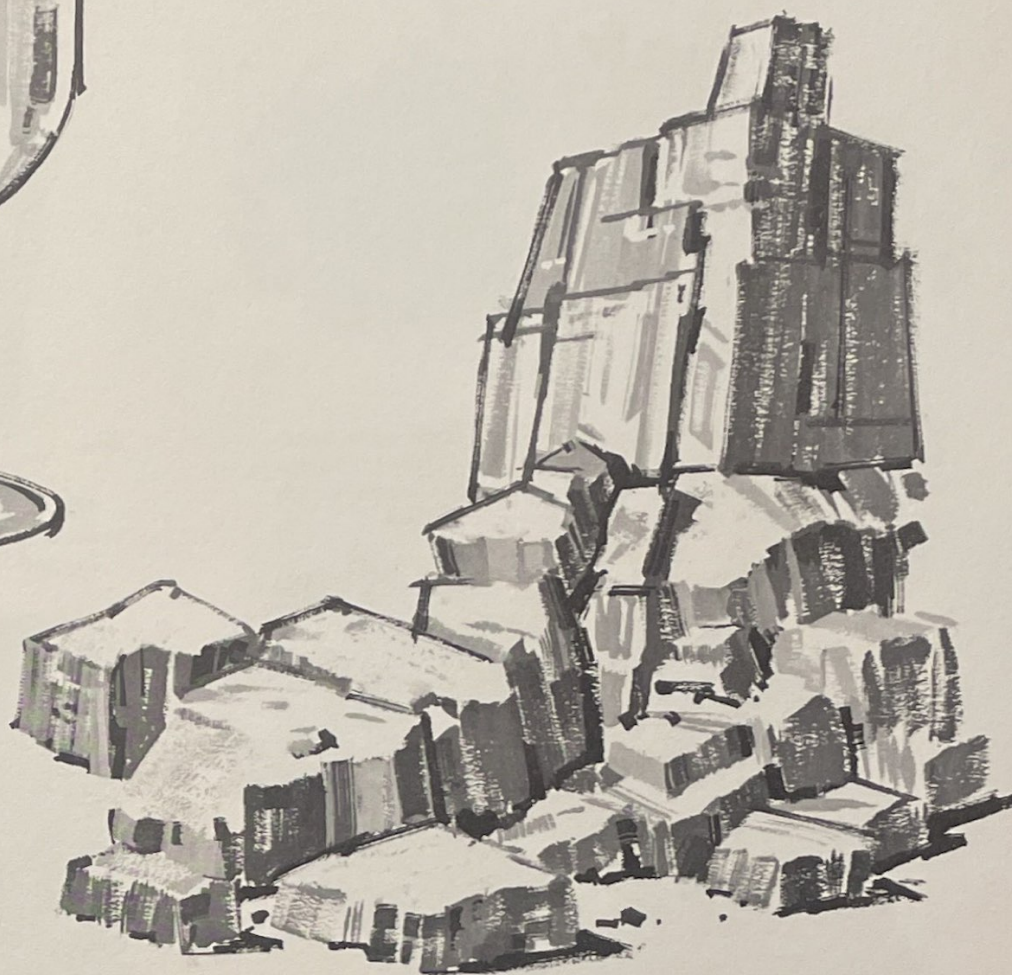


Opaque Wash Textures

Study the different textures the artist created in opaque wash. After you have carefully examined how each one was done, do the exercise provided on the sheet marked "Opaque Texture Practice." Refer to the finished art as you render your practice sheet. Try to get the textures exactly like those pictured. When you complete the textures, save the practice sheet for your own reference.



The artist painted over his pencil sketch with a middle gray value. Then he added the dark gray shadows. He finished the fur with quick, small strokes of white and light gray paint.



This pile of stones was rendered in a quick, sure manner. Notice how the artist used a variety of tones and textures together with consideration of light source and the resulting shadows.

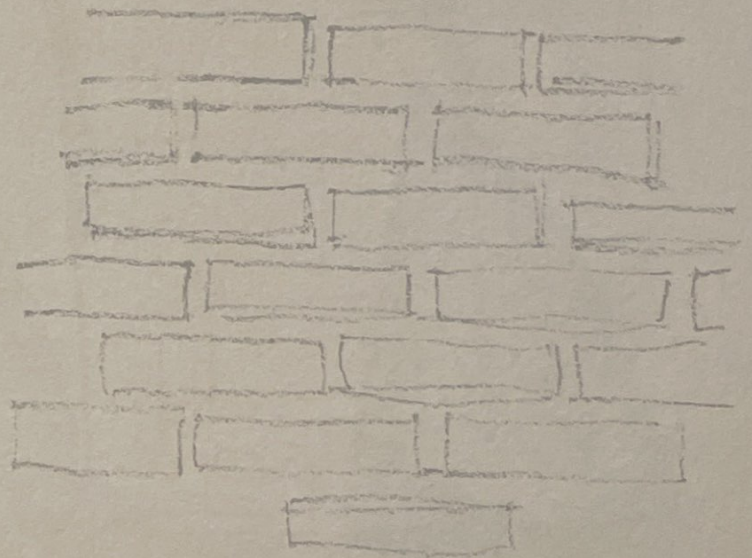
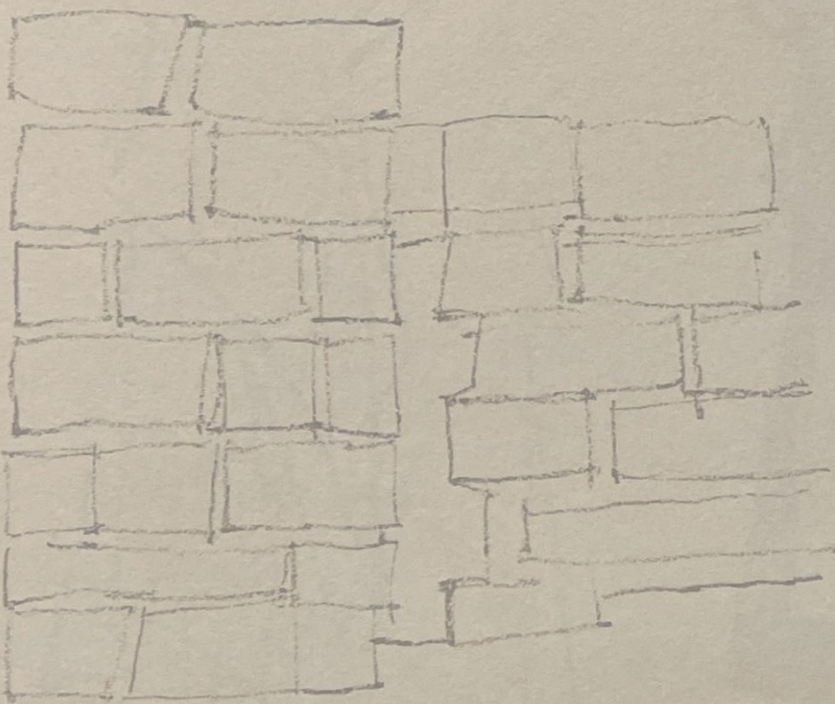
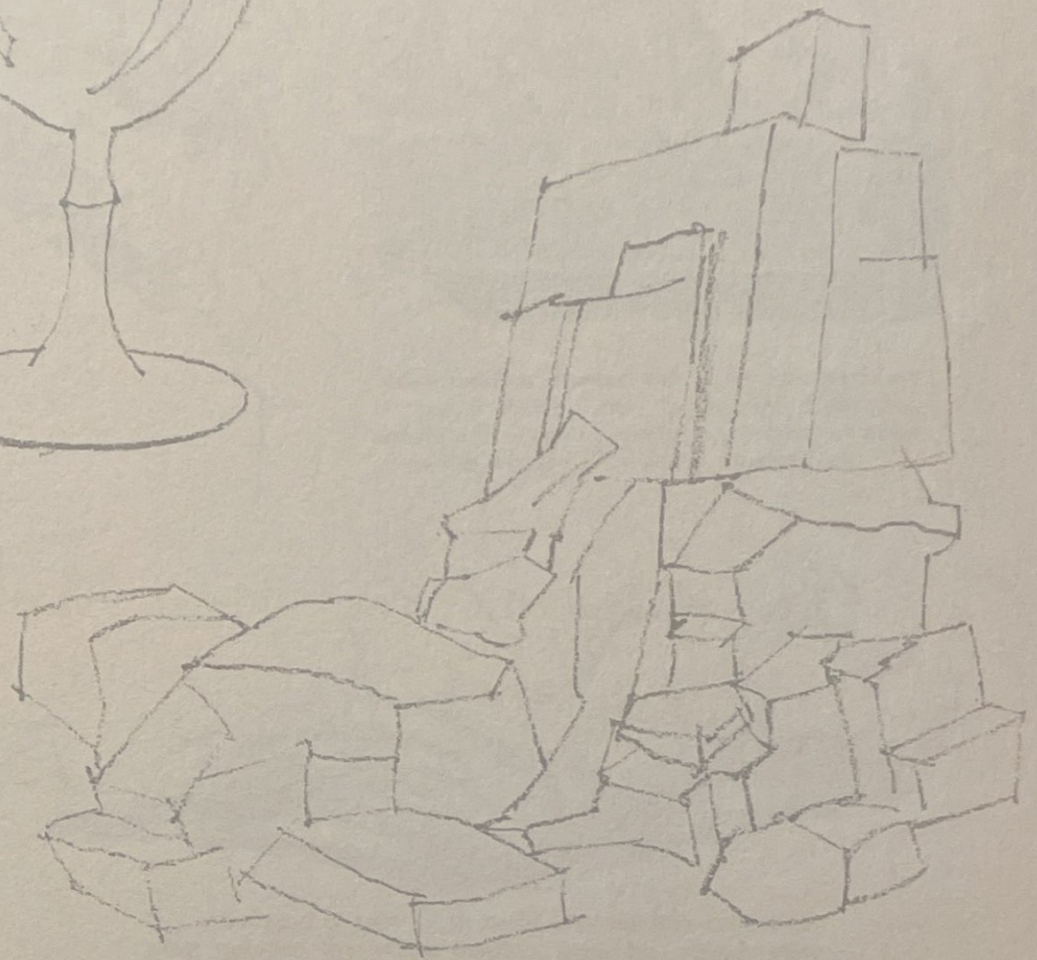
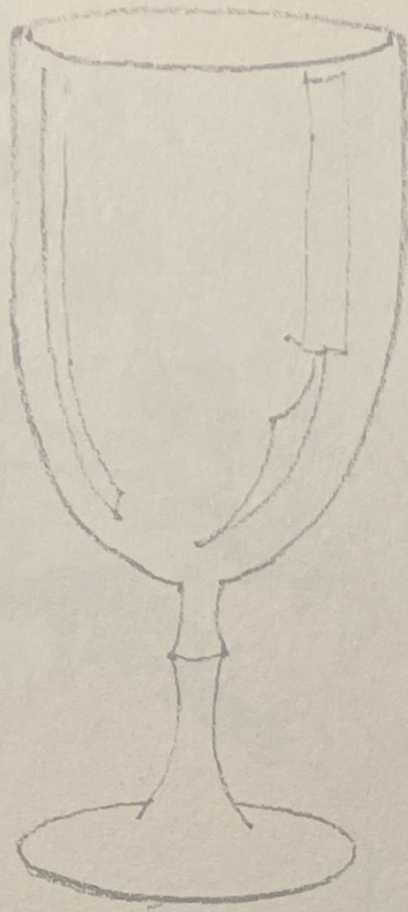
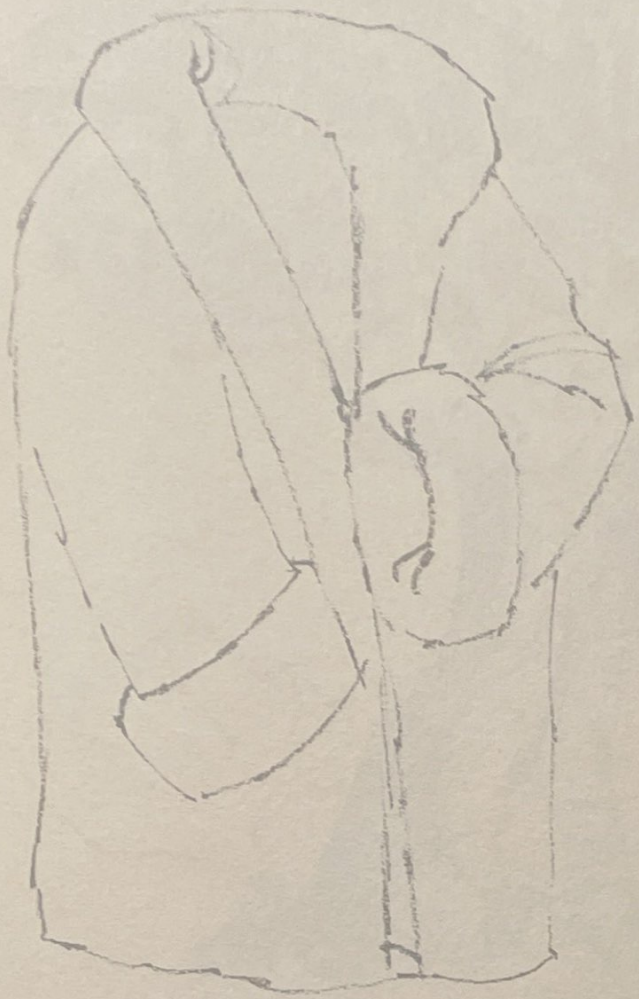


Notice the combination of techniques used for these stones. The artist used a light value for the base tone and then added shadows and details.



For this brick wall, the artist used the white of the paper to indicate mortar. He placed the base tone of each brick with a single stroke. Then he added white and dark cross-hatching for realistic texture.

OPAQUE TEXTURE PRACTICE



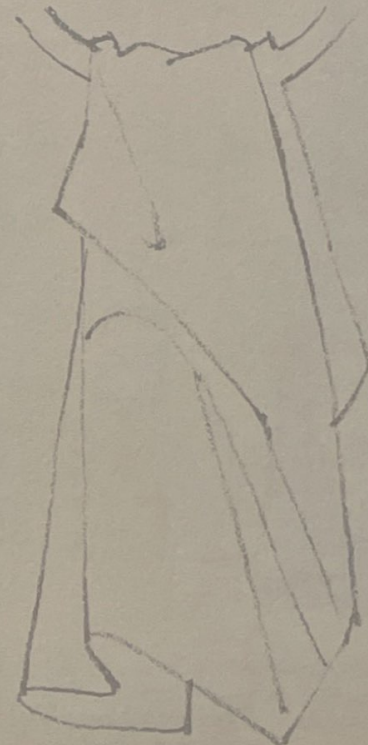
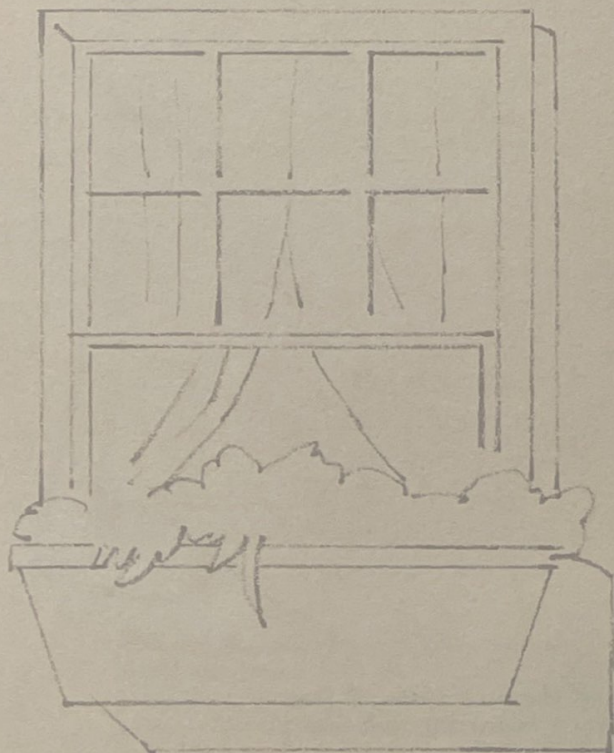
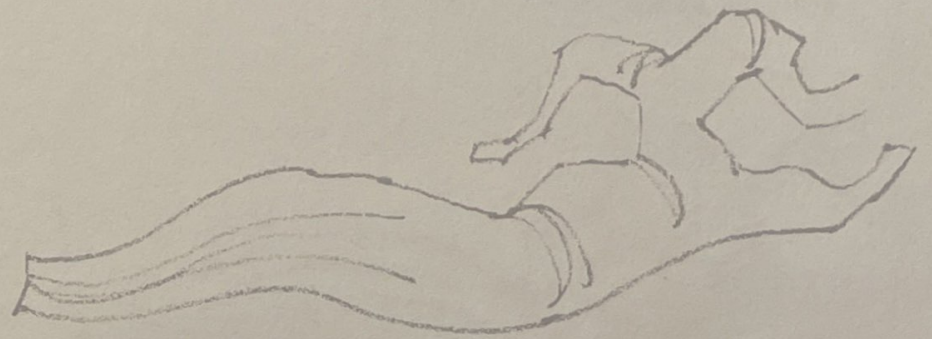
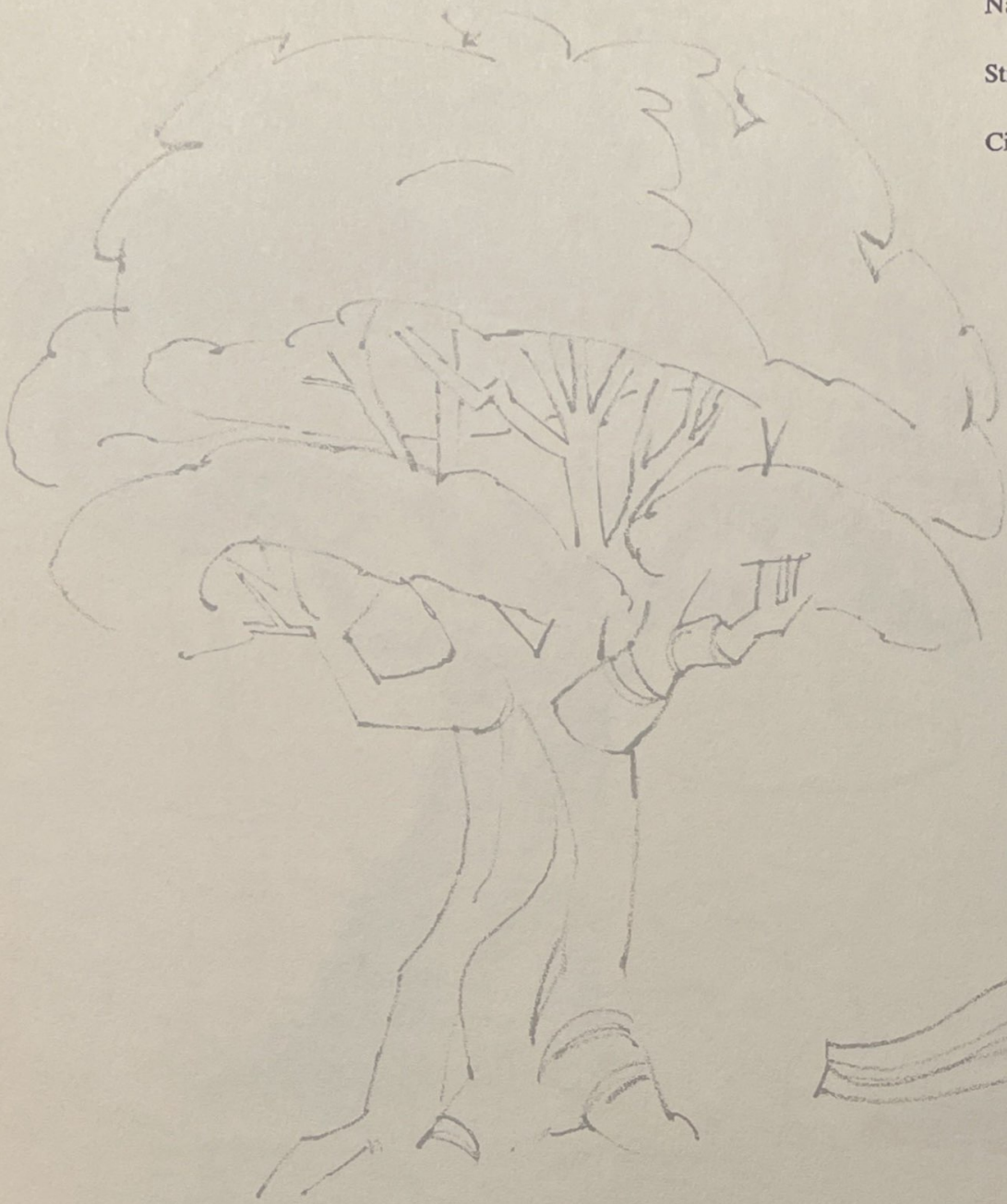
This practice sheet should be sent to the school. It will show us some of your practice work and will help determine your grade. Your instructor will study these drawings before he evaluates your lesson assignment work.

Student No. _____ Date _____

Name _____

Street No. _____

City _____ State _____





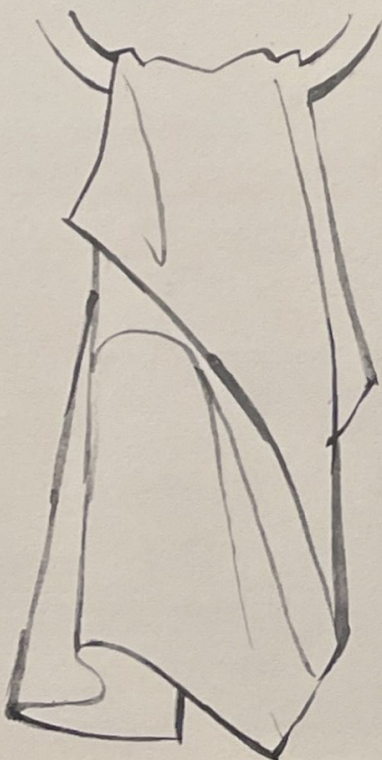
The artist first laid in a middle value over his pencil drawing. Then he put in the light values. After these areas dried he added the details and accents still needed. Notice the light source and the texture of the tree trunk. Much of the detail was laid over other values.



The artist first painted the large flat areas on his pencil sketch. Then he applied highlights, details and accents. Careful application of paint gives the window a realistic appearance.



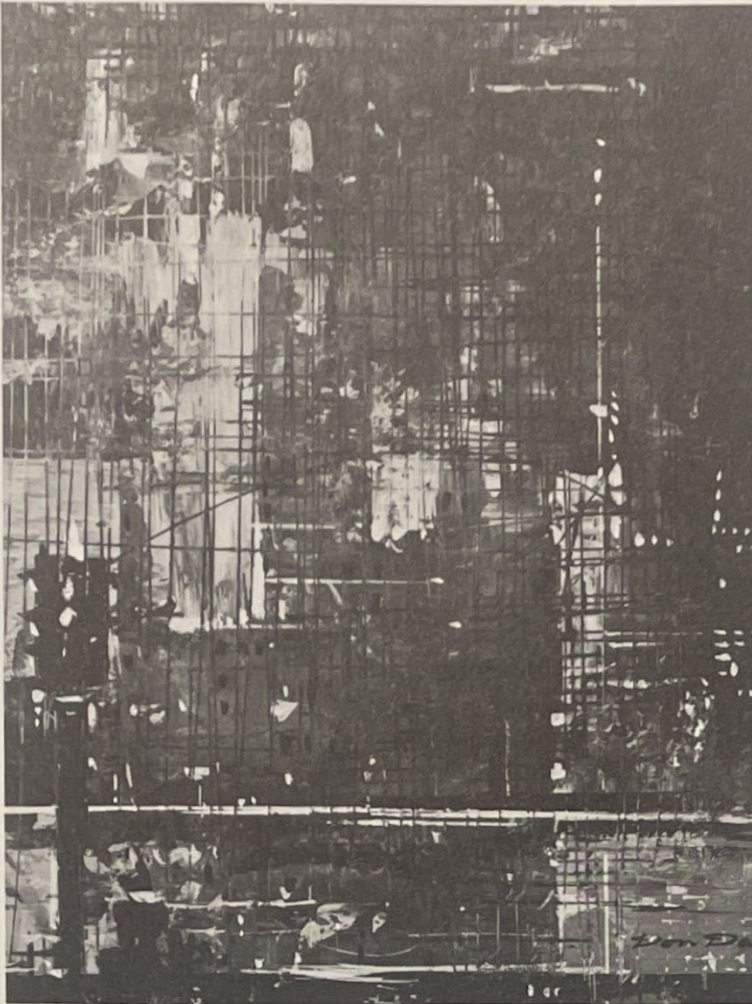
The artist used a split brush technique for this driftwood. After painting the stump medium gray he added white highlights. Then he used a split brush for the shadows and wood texture.



This step-by-step demonstration shows how the artist developed this towel. First he outlined his pencil sketch with a medium gray. In the second step he laid in the large dark areas. He did not attempt to indicate texture. He just established the main shadow areas. In the final step the artist

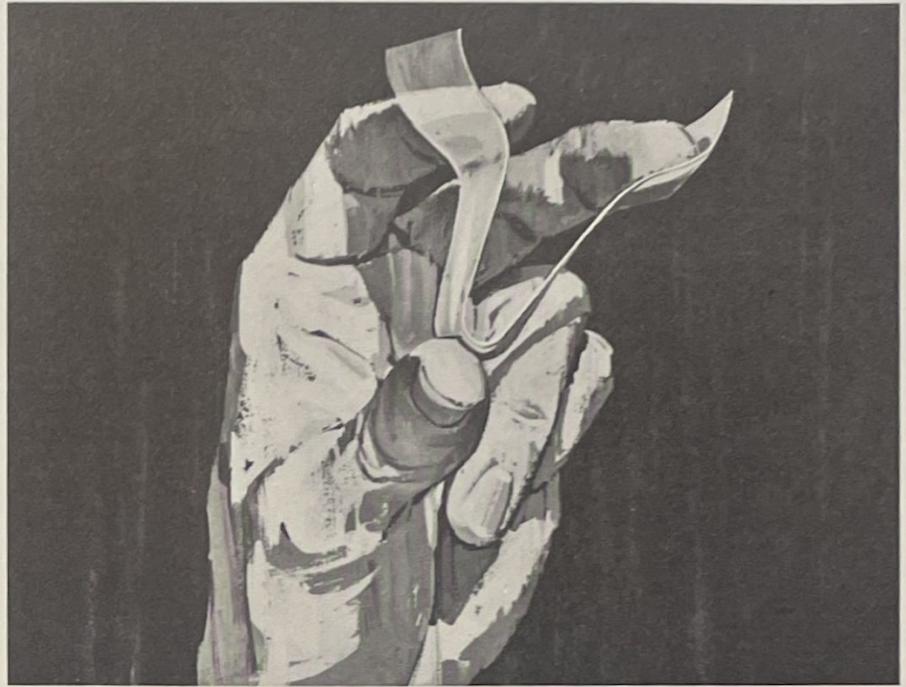
developed the texture. He used a combination stipple and dry brush to give this a realistic towel appearance. Notice how the dark gray areas show through on the towel and give it a fluffy appearance.

Opaque Wash in Commercial Art



Street scene by Art Instruction Schools' student Don Davis.

This illustration of a rainy street scene employs the scratching technique. By building up the paint thickness the artist formed a perfect working area for scratching. He used a sharp instrument to scratch in the "rain" while the paint was still "tacky".



Advertisement by Mayo Olmstead.

This interesting advertisement shows how well light opaque values can be used over a dark background. Notice how the artist has allowed the dark background to come through the light tones of the hand. These dark "flecks" give this advertising illustration vitality and freshness.

This fine illustration combines the block method of rendering with dry brush and line for accents. The artist developed this painting by using flat tones, and then adding the delicate details of the trees, grass, bushes, and so forth.

Courtesy of Carlson-Kemart Corp., artist John Berkey.





This advertising illustration was rendered with a variety of brush strokes. The artist used a combination of dry brush and over-painting to indicate the texture of the beard and fur of this "cavewoman". Notice the effective use of contrast in this cartoon.

Opaque wash cartoon by Lowell Herrero.

Here is an excellent example of what can be done with a palette knife. The artist used his knife for the large textured areas and developed the details with his brush. Notice the interesting texture that the palette knife technique makes possible.

Illustration by George Karn, Jr.



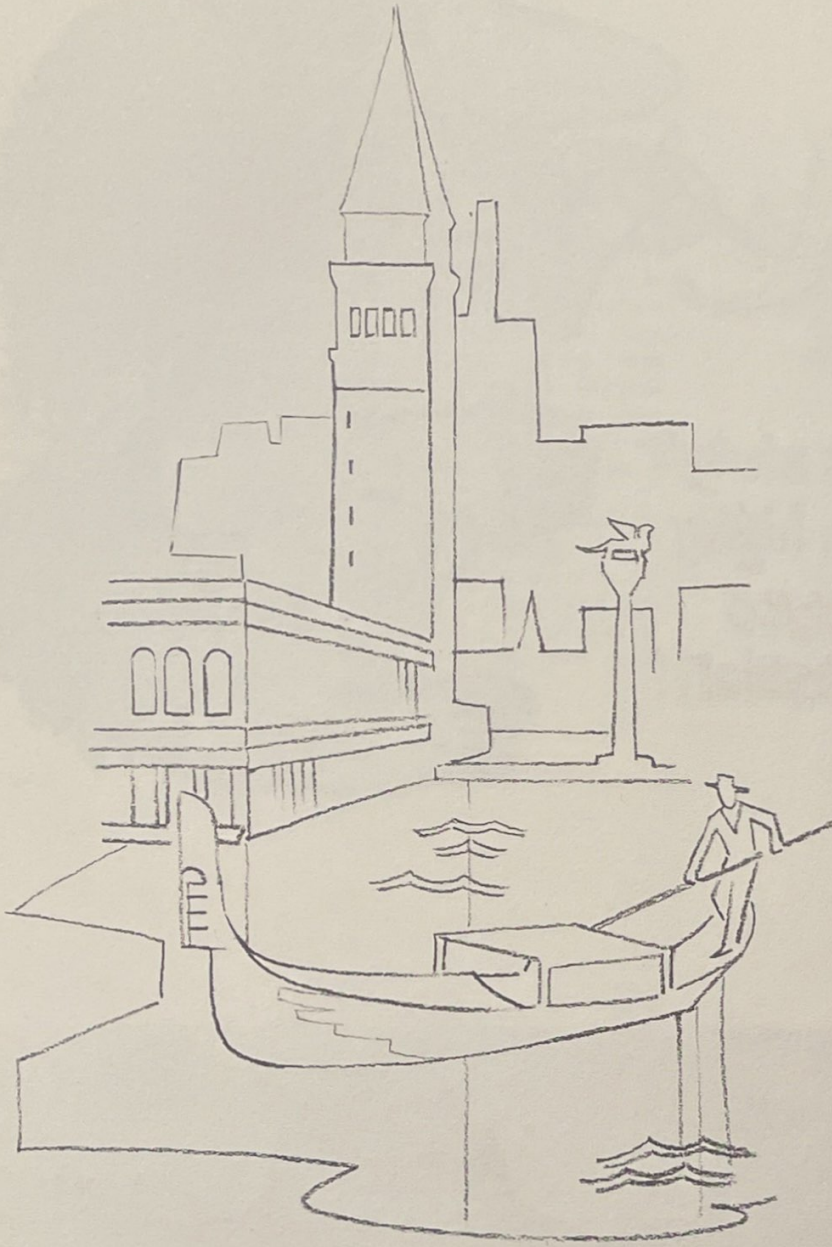
Developing a Flat Opaque Wash

After your outline drawing has been transferred and sprayed with fixatif (to prevent smearing) you should tape the outside margins with masking tape. This will keep a clean, consistent border around the picture.

The decision to paint light to dark, or dark to light is a personal choice, and one you should decide upon after trying both methods. The advantage of starting with a dark value is that it immediately establishes a strong value pattern. This method is especially useful if you don't have time to make extensive value sketches first.

Working from light to dark is preferred by many artists because it gives them a framework or value note to start from. If you decide on a light or medium light gray and paint this first, then it's easy to add highlights and dark accents. Working from light to dark is also good because it has a tendency to tie your work together and give it tonal unity.

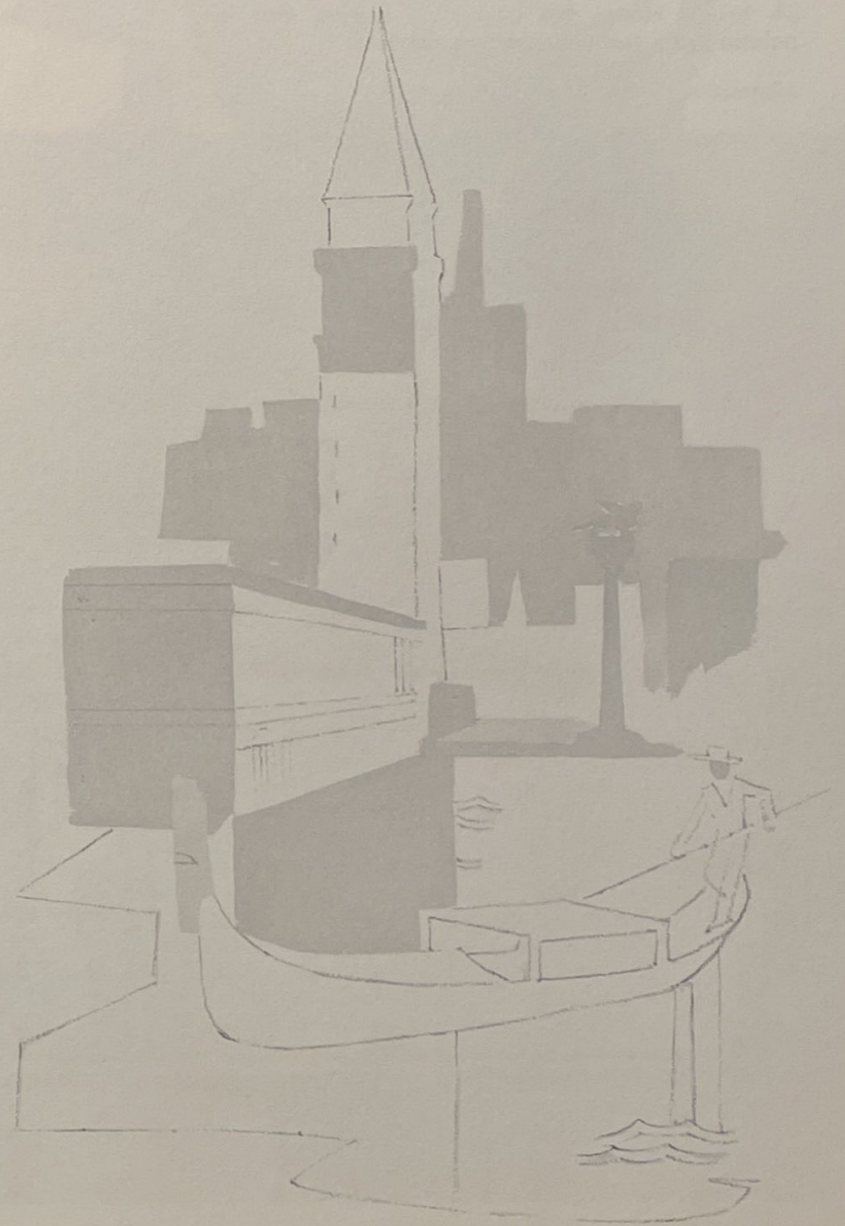
In this sketch the artist laid in the large areas of the medium gray tones. Notice that the details are not included at this point. It's best to get a large portion of the picture painted in general tones before adding details. Details can distract from more important considerations of shape, form, value and design.



Before you begin to paint, you should plan every aspect of your picture. You will get better results when you determine the placement of the shapes and values *before* you start painting.

Start by deciding on the basic shapes and forms of your picture. This may require research. You can sketch from nature or study the photos from your clipping file. But even for decorative pictures like this scene of the gondola on the Venetian canal, research is needed to make the art convincing. You will probably make many changes on your original drawings, so it's best to work on a small scale. Small drawings, often called "thumb nail sketches", are easy to change and don't waste much time or paper.

Before you begin to paint, you should make several sketches to arrange the tones and values in your picture. These can be worked out in pencil, charcoal or in the same medium you plan to use for the finished art. Again, these may be done on a small scale. After these steps are developed you are ready to make an outline drawing and transfer it to your good paper. This first demonstration drawing is a simple "line guide" for the painting.



Because the artist started with light values it's natural that the picture needs more dark tones as it nears completion. You should generally use a full range of values. Contrast makes a drawing more interesting. Too many students forget to use enough dark tones in their paintings and drawings.

Notice that even though a variety of values are found in this picture, there is no actual modeling or shading. In a flat, decorative picture such as this, form and structure aren't shown in the traditional way. Instead, to show these elements, you will have to paint flat areas of tone, each with a slightly different value. This can be done free hand or by masking out each area with tape. Masking is quite slow but the crisp edges and clean look of the finished art work are very impressive, and especially effective on a highly decorative type of art.

On a picture like this you may want the paint perfectly smooth. This means you will have to work quickly. Also, if this crisp appearance is desired you must avoid painting over areas that are only partially dry. Working back into drying opaque paint will usually produce a rough texture. The paint itself should be just a little thinner than usual for this kind of "smooth" rendering.



Step-by-step demonstration by Raymond Dowsett.



After you've applied the large areas of flat paint you will find that the majority of the details have been covered up. To locate these you must re-use your transfer drawing. Lightly tape this over your painting and retrace only the parts of the drawing that are needed to finish the art. If there are any carbon smudges on your painting when you pull the transfer drawing off, clean them up with a kneaded eraser.

One of the most important aspects of adding the last tone is that it will balance the picture. In the previous stages, some of the areas were more developed than others and the painting looked poorly designed. Now, with the final additions, the dark value "fills" these empty spots.

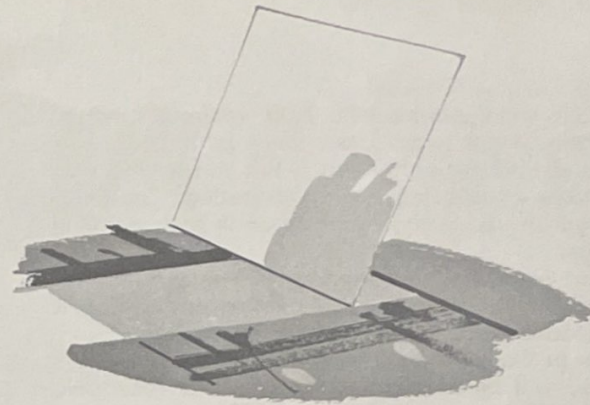
The dark accents also give meaning to what appeared to be simple swatches of tone. Large rectangular shapes become buildings with the addition of dark accents for windows. And the foreground shapes now read in full detail as a figure and a gondola. In this final stage each detail must be done carefully. For, although opaque paint is good for "over painting" and correcting, corrections on the final stage will make a picture appear less professional.

To gain full experience in handling opaque wash, you should experiment with more textured painting as well as with "smooth" art work like this illustration.

Helpful Hints



You can use masking tape to "mask off" your drawing. When you peel the tape off, it will leave a clean, white margin.

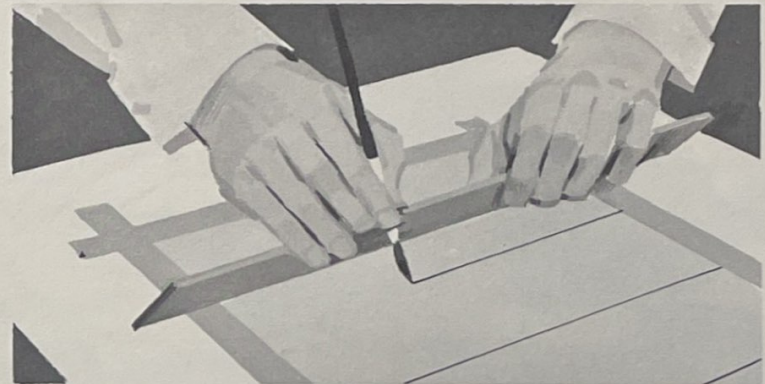


It is good practice to mix sufficient quantities of each needed value before you begin working. However, if you run out of paint you should test the next mixture before using it on your artwork. Brush some of the new paint on a small test swatch of paper, identical to the paper you're working on, allow it to dry and then compare. Lighten or darken as needed. Test again and use when the right value has been mixed.

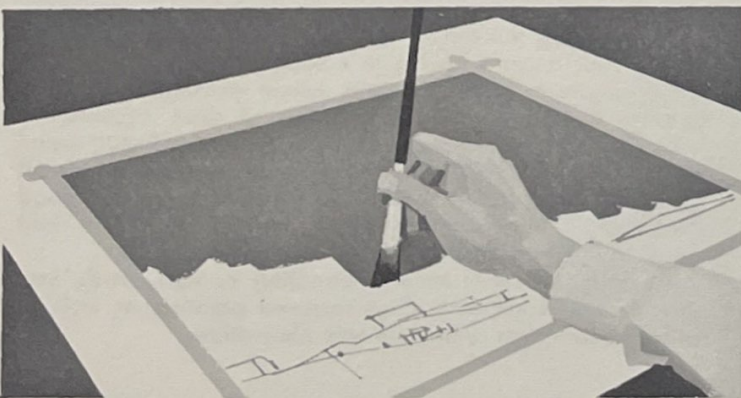
You can use your ruler to make straight brush lines. By holding the ruler as illustrated, you will be able to slide the ferrule (metal part of the brush) along an edge of a ruler.



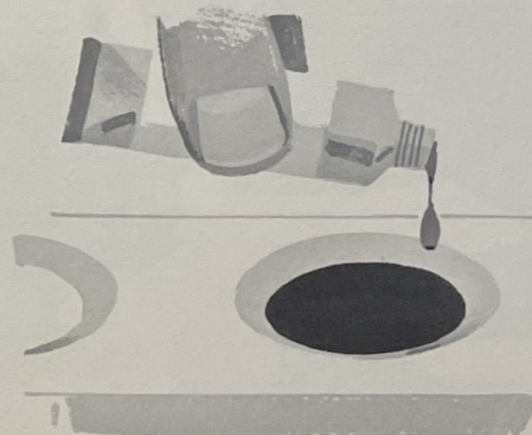
Paint tends to settle so it's a good idea to stir them occasionally, even when you're not using them.



A wide, flat brush (made of bristle rather than red sable) is excellent for painting large areas. It makes the paint flow on smoothly.



A drop or two of yellow ochre removes the "bluish" cast of opaque wash. Blue does not photograph well, and consequently a little yellow ochre watercolor in the opaque washes you do for reproduction will produce better results.



Using Black and White

This Indian was carefully rendered, but it lacks contrast. Too many beginning art students forget to use black and white in their opaque wash paintings.



Notice how much more effective the same Indian is with the addition of black and white. The added contrast makes the drawing livelier and more interesting.



Demonstration by John Berkey.

Checking up on Yourself

Because opaque wash is such an important aspect of your studies in art, we have picked out some of the important points that you have studied. These points will help you refresh your memory before you begin the Opaque Wash Assignment.

Do You Remember That:

1. Opaque paint should be the consistency of cream.
2. You should work on heavy paper so the paint will not make it buckle.
3. Opaque wash can be combined with many other mediums.
4. The thickness of opaque wash makes it possible to create some interesting textures.
5. A drop or two of yellow ochre watercolor is good for opaque wash that is to be reproduced.
6. You should always mix your paint very carefully to avoid streaks.
7. A palette knife can be used for mixing and applying paint.
8. You can create a number of textures in one picture.
9. You should avoid painting into drying areas of opaque because the paint will become rough.
10. You should always mix enough paint to cover an area.

Did You:

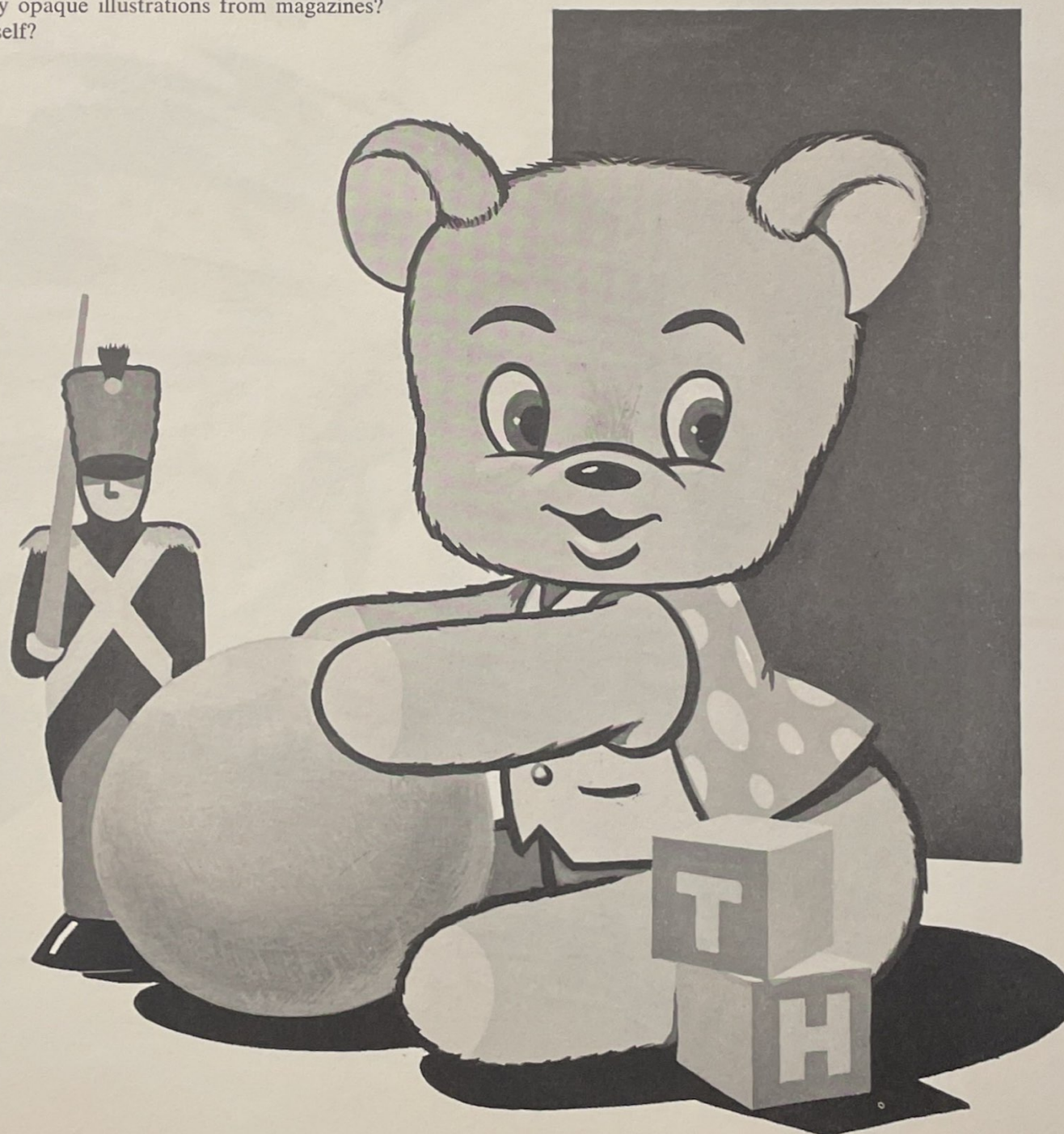
1. Always plan your artwork before beginning to apply your opaque wash?
2. Try doing a monoprint?
3. Do all of the exercises called "WHAT TO DO" as well as the texture practice?
4. Clip out any opaque illustrations from magazines?
5. Enjoy yourself?

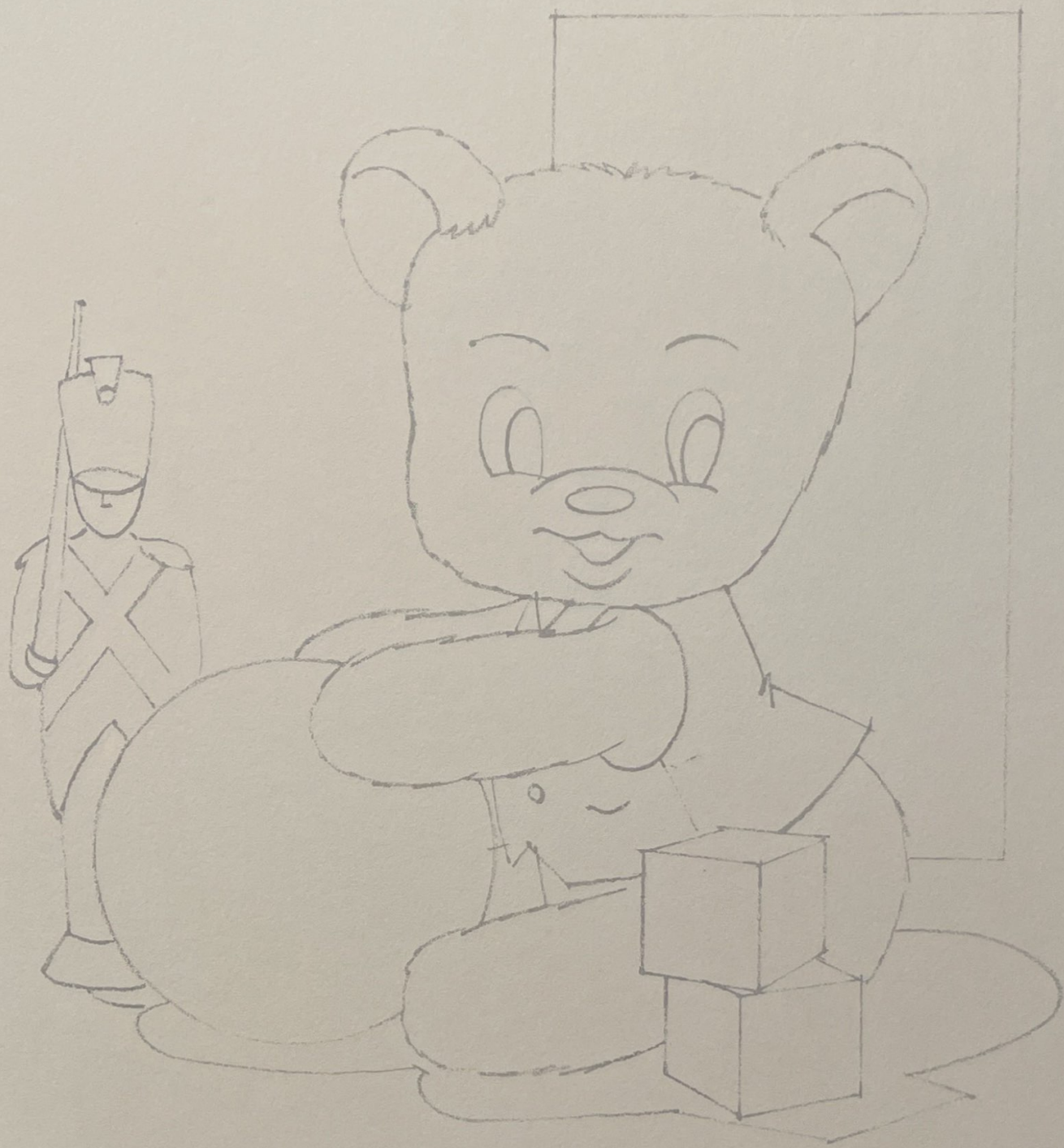
OPAQUE WASH LESSON

You are now ready to begin your assignment for the Opaque Wash Lesson. We have provided you with two outlines of the toys. One of these outlines is for practice and the other is to be completed and sent to the school.

This project will give you a chance to mix several values and use wet or fine brush blending. When you mix your paints for the picture, keep them about the consistency of cream. Mix the light values first, and put them down as neatly as you can. Be sure to mix enough to cover each area. After your light areas are dry, add the darker grays. Once you have all of the flat tones in, blend the ball with either the fine brush (dry) method or the wet blend method. You may omit the polka dots on the vest and the letters on the blocks if you prefer. Save the pure white and black areas until last.

When you have completed your painting, send it to us for grading along with the Opaque Wash Test. Your drawing will be graded on its neatness and how closely it resembles the finished art in the lesson.





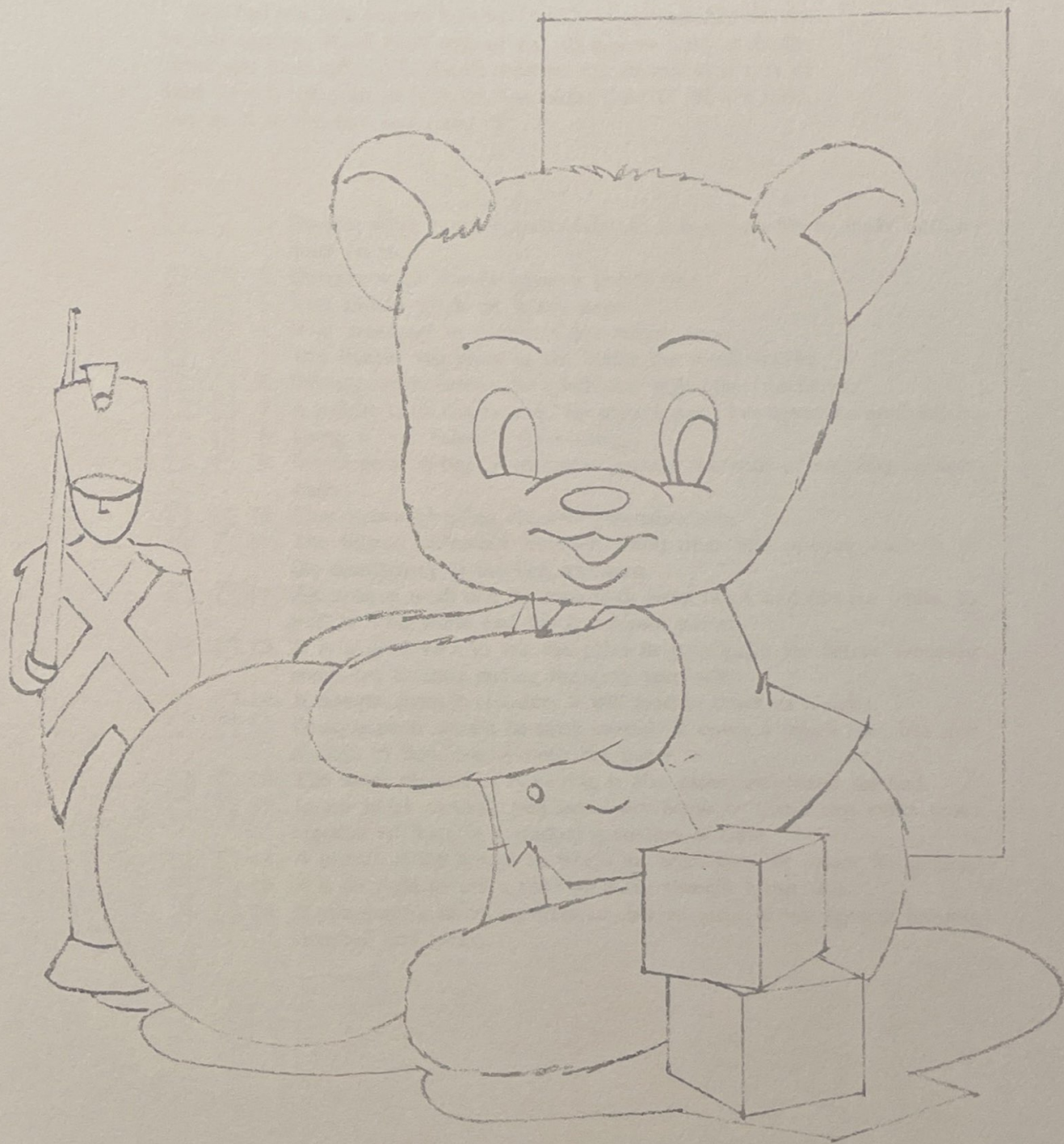
OPAQUE WASH LESSON ASSIGNMENT

Student No. _____ Date _____

Name _____

Street No. _____

City _____ State _____



OPAQUE WASH LESSON ASSIGNMENT

Student No. _____ Date _____

Name _____

Street No. _____

City _____ State _____

Opaque Wash Test

This test will help you see how well you have studied the material in this section. Read each one of the statements very carefully. After you have studied it, decide whether the statement is true or false. If it is true, put an X in the box under the "T". If it is false, put an X in the box under the "F".

T F

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| ☐ | ☐ | 1. Opaque wash is not popular because it is impossible to make corrections on it. |
| ☐ | ☐ | 2. Opaque wash should cover a pencil line. |
| ☐ | ☐ | 3. You should work on heavy paper. |
| ☐ | ☐ | 4. It is necessary to purchase pre-mixed grays. |
| ☐ | ☐ | 5. The thicker the paint is the better the result will be. |
| ☐ | ☐ | 6. Opaque wash <i>cannot</i> be combined with other mediums. |
| ☐ | ☐ | 7. A palette knife can be used for mixing paint but never for applying it. |
| ☐ | ☐ | 8. Using a "set palette" saves time. |
| ☐ | ☐ | 9. Broad point is one of the most popular methods of blending opaque wash. |
| ☐ | ☐ | 10. Fine stroke blending requires "crosshatching." |
| ☐ | ☐ | 11. The biggest difference between transparent and opaque wash is in the consistency of the two mediums. |
| ☐ | ☐ | 12. An opaque wash can be done with lamp black and opaque white, as well as with white and black tempera paints. |
| ☐ | ☐ | 13. It is a good idea to stir the paint in your paint jar before scooping some out to start mixing the gray you want. |
| ☐ | ☐ | 14. If opaque paint is too thin, it will tend to crack as it dries. |
| ☐ | ☐ | 15. Opaque paint should be thick enough to cover a pencil line, but thin enough to flow evenly onto the paper. |
| ☐ | ☐ | 16. The block method of rendering is also called the poster method. |
| ☐ | ☐ | 17. In the block method, you use a dry brush to blend two value areas together so there is a gradual gradation of tone. |
| ☐ | ☐ | 18. A palette is the article on which an artist puts his colors for mixing. |
| ☐ | ☐ | 19. It is all right to use a ruler to make straight brush lines. |
| ☐ | ☐ | 20. If you paint into drying areas of opaque paint, it will tend to become streaked and messy. |

Send your Opaque Texture Practice sheet, your Opaque Wash Lesson Assignment, and this test to the school in one envelope.

Student No. _____ Date _____

Name _____

Street No. _____

City _____ State _____